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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001741

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TAGS: PTER ASEC PGOV NP
SUBJECT: MAOISTS STAGE MAJOR ATTACKS IN EAST AND WEST

REF: A. (A) KATHMANDU 1693
 1B. (B) KATHMANDU 1674
 1C. (C) KATHMANDU 1589
 1D. (D) KATHMANDU 0379

Classified By: Amb. Malinowski. Reason: 1.5(B,D).

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) In their largest actions against the security forces since the onset of the monsoon in May, late September 7 Maoist insurgents attacked a police post in a remote area of eastern Sindhuli District, about 100 km southeast of Kathmandu, and the local government headquarters in Arghakhanchi District, about 200 km southwest of Kathmandu, late September 8. At least 90 police and 17 soldiers have been killed in both attacks. Royal Nepal Army (RNA) soldiers pursued and have engaged Maoists fleeing northwest after the attack in Arghakhanchi. As of COB September 9, fighting between the RNA and Maoists was continuing on the border between Arghakhanchi and Pyuthan Districts. The success and scale of both operations, which occurred almost exactly 24 hours but more than 300 km apart, indicate that the Maoists likely used the monsoon lull from June to August to consolidate and reorganize their forces after losses incurred in May. The twin attacks will force Prime Minister Deuba to consider possible re-imposition of the state of emergency, which expired August 28. End summary.

POLICE POST IN EAST OVERRUN . . .

12. (U) In the early morning hours of September 8, Maoist insurgents attacked a remote police post in Bhiman, Sindhuli District, approximately 100 km southeast of Kathmandu. At least 49 policemen (out of a total force of 73) were killed and 22 wounded. The remaining two policemen were reported missing. The Nepali press reported six bodies of suspected Maoist guerrillas were found in the vicinity of the police post.

13. (SBU) The attack began about 11:45 p.m. the night of September 7. Many of the more senior policemen killed were reportedly shot at close range in the head, indicating that they may have surrendered before being executed. As in previous attacks on remote installations, the insurgents cut down trees to barricade roads and prevent reinforcements from reaching the site. Unlike previous attacks on police posts, however, in which the Maoists looted most of the weapons from their fallen enemy, many of the dead policemen's .303 Enfield rifles were found still lying near their bodies.

. . . AND DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS IN WEST

14. (SBU) At about 11:30 p.m. the night of September 8, insurgents attacked the district headquarters in Arghakhanchi, about 200 km southwest of Kathmandu, hitting the police headquarters first. Radio communications with the district were cut almost immediately thereafter, complicating the flow of information from the site. Fighting continued for about five hours thereafter. A total of 161 regular police, 30 members of the paramilitary Armed Police Force (APF), and 50 soldiers of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) were stationed at the headquarters. Initial reports indicate 32 policemen, 9 members of the APF, and 17 RNA soldiers were killed in the attack. An additional 22 policemen, including the highest-ranking officer in the district, 2 members of the APF, and 4 soldiers were wounded.

15. (SBU) An RNA helicopter was unable to reach the site until approximately nine hours after the battle began, reportedly because of adverse weather conditions. One of the helicopter crew said that he observed a number of local government offices in flames, as well as many bodies scattered on the ground. The Chief District Officer, the ranking civil servant in the district, was in Kathmandu at the time of the attack. Initial reports list the Assistant

Chief District Officer as missing. There were no other reports of potential civilian casualties.

16. (C) According to a source at RNA Headquarters, unlike the attack in Sindhuli, the insurgents succeeded in stealing a significant number of weapons from both the police headquarters and from the military barracks. RNA reinforcements are pursuing Maoist combatants, who are headed northwest toward the border with the neighboring district of Pyuthan. As of COB September 9, fighting was continuing on the Arghakhanchi-Pyuthan border, under the direction of the commander of the 3rd Brigade.

MORE PRE-BANDH VIOLENCE

17. (SBU) Before the twin attacks on Sindhuli and Arghakhanchi, Maoists continued their campaign of violence in apparent preparation for their self-proclaimed general strike, or "bandh," September 16, by destroying local government offices in two districts near Kathmandu. A total of nine Village Development Committee (VDC) offices and several health posts were destroyed over the past week in Kavre District, which is about 25 km southeast of Kathmandu. On September 7 armed Maoists destroyed eight VDC buildings in Sindhupalchowk District, about 45 km northeast of Kathmandu, and another two VDC buildings in Tehrathum District in the far-eastern part of the country.

INDIAN COOPERATION

18. (C) On September 8 Nepal's Ambassador to India Behn Thapa confirmed to the Ambassador that the Indian government had handed over to Nepali authorities Bamdev Chhetri, the Secretary of the banned Indian-Nepal Unity Society. Chhetri

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was reportedly arrested in Delhi. Thapa said Chhetri had been under surveillance by the Indian authorities for some time before his arrest. According to Nepali police sources, following his arrest in Delhi Chhetri was turned over to Indian border police, who then turned him over to police in Nepalganj, in southwestern Nepal, where the RNA took custody of him. Chhetri is the highest-ranking Maoist turned over to Nepali authorities by the Indian government.

COMMENT

19. (C) The operation in Arghakhanchi is the first attack on a district headquarters since February, when the Maoists launched a devastating assault in Achham, in far-western Nepal, that leveled the capital (Ref D). The attacks in Sindhuli and Arghakhanchi mark the first resumption of the Maoists' classic tactic--large-scale, nighttime attacks on fixed positions held by the security forces--since May, right before the onset of the monsoon. With the monsoon now over, most observers were expecting a resumption of hostilities from the Maoists. Over the past few weeks RNA sources have told us their intelligence had indications of preparations for a major Maoist attack in the east (Ref C). We had not heard, however, of indications of a two-pronged attack--just one day apart--in separate parts of the country. The success of these two operations indicates that the Maoists, however bruised and battered they may have been by a series of defeats in May and June, still command sufficient resources and manpower and have adequate communications capability to launch two near-simultaneous attacks over wide distances in different parts of the country. Although the RNA is engaging the Maoists on the Pyuthan-Arghakhanchi border, the fact that the government did not see these attacks coming--in spite of its purported intelligence reports--and that the security forces were unable to repulse them will do little to instill public confidence in the ability of the RNA and police to protect the general population from Maoist violence before and during the September 16 bandh and November 13 general elections. The Prime Minister, whose attention has been distracted from the conflict by intra-party political wrangling, will now have to refocus on the security situation in the country, including possible re-imposition of the state of emergency, which expired August 28.

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